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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Fifteenth session
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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Hanna Beate SCHÖPP-SCHILLING (Germany)

Addendum

IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

B. Consideration of reports

1. Initial reports

Ethiopia

1. The Committee considered the combined initial, second and third periodic reports of Ethiopia (CEDAW/C/ETH/1-3 and Add.1) at its 292nd and 293rd meetings, on 19 January, and at its 299th meeting, on 24 January 1996 (see CEDAW/C/SR.292, 293 and 299).

2. In introducing the reports, the representative of Ethiopia said that the political situation of her country had not always been conducive to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the time of ratification, about 60 per cent of the national budget was being expended on the war effort. The war was accompanied by drought and famine that had cost millions of lives. The change in Government in 1991 brought a transition from war to peace, from dictatorship to democracy and from a command economy to a more market-oriented economy. The

new Government inherited a situation aggravated by a social crisis, with millions of displaced persons and refugees, unemployment and the destruction of the little social service infrastructure the country had had. In 1994 a new Constitution was adopted and in 1995 a federal Government formed. The representative indicated that the recent political changes were having a positive impact on the welfare of Ethiopian women. One important step had been the adoption of the National Women's Policy.

3. The representative pointed out that the situation of women in Ethiopia had been particularly difficult because of the country's economic backwardness and women's disadvantaged access to opportunities. However, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was committed to the advancement of women. A manifestation of that commitment was the setting up of the Women's Affairs Office within the Prime Minister's Office. Several measures had been adopted to address gender disparities. The new Constitution reflected a strong commitment to the principles of the Convention. About 3 per cent of the seats in Parliament were held by women. Women were well represented at community level and even better at local level, because the electorate had found that women had been less corrupt and had given due care to those in need.

4. The representative stated further that Ethiopia had accepted the Beijing Platform for Action without reservation and was focusing on poverty reduction as the primary critical area of concern. Poverty constituted the root cause of the many problems faced by women. The Women's Affairs Office planned to compile gender-specific statistics to monitor the impact of policies and programmes on girls and women. Apart from the existing political will and commitment of the Government, the achievement of the goals of the national policy for women required substantial financial and material resources. The representative said that a lot was expected from the international donor community.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

5. The Committee expressed appreciation for the frank and honest report and the equally frank presentation. The fact that the Minister for Women's Affairs herself introduced the report was indicative of the commitment to the advancement of women in the country. The Committee also appreciated that Ethiopia had ratified the Convention as well as several other international human rights instruments and had accepted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action without reservation.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

6. The Committee identified as major factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention: (a) the poverty of the country; (b) the deep-rooted customs and traditions; (c) illiteracy; (d) demographic growth; and (e) unemployment. These were compounded by the existence of different kinds of laws, namely, international and national as well as a variety of customary and religious ones.

Positive aspects

7. Appreciation was expressed for the political will in adopting a national policy for the advancement of women as well as for the integration of a gender perspective in other policies, including the creation of women's focal points in national, regional and local political decision-making bodies.

8. The Committee commended the Government for the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

9. The Committee welcomed the high percentage of women at local government level.

10. The Committee welcomed the affirmative action efforts from women at the university level.

Principal subjects of concern

11. The Committee noted with concern that neither the combined report nor the addendum followed the Committee's general guidelines, which had created obstacles to constructive dialogue between the Committee and the State party.

12. The Committee felt that if the areas of competence of the mechanisms set up for changing the status of women were not clearly defined and if proper financing was not secured, initiatives could be blocked.

13. While commending the translation of the Convention into Amharic, the Committee was nevertheless concerned about the dissemination of the Convention in view of the number of other languages that were also spoken in the country.

14. In addition to the cultural obstacles, the Committee expressed concern over still existing discriminatory laws at the national level and at persistent discrimination in the family.

15. Major concern was expressed by the Committee over the issue of widespread female genital mutilation and the incidence of violence against women and girls. Regarding female genital mutilation, while recognizing that it was a tradition deeply rooted in custom that could not be eliminated by law, much could be done through general and specific education of the women involved in practising it or asking for it.

16. The Committee was concerned about the prevalence of prostitution and male promiscuity, which increased the spread of AIDS. Early marriage was also a great concern to the Committee.

17. Concern was also expressed about the discriminatory law that made Ethiopian women who married foreigners lose their nationality.

18. The Committee noted the lack of visibility of women at the higher decision-making levels and was doubtful about the effectiveness of programmes if adopted without the involvement and concurrence of the majority of women concerned. It expressed its doubts over the efficiency of any measures to eradicate poverty as

long as the percentage of women in Government remained as low as it was at present.

19. The Committee expressed concern over the high level of illiteracy, the high school drop-out rate, sexual harassment of girls at school and the lack of vocational training programmes.

Suggestions and recommendations

20. The Committee suggested that subsequent reports follow the Committee's general guideline for reporting.

21. When resources were available, the translation of the Convention must be in as many local languages as possible so that it benefited many people.

22. The Committee suggested that a review of all existing customary laws in ethnic groups be carried out in order to evaluate them as to their substance and their compatibility with international conventions and national legislation.

23. Awareness programmes and legal measures must be put in place urgently to abolish the practice of female genital mutilation and all other such practices that discriminated against women. Those who performed female genital mutilation must be helped to find other sources of income.

24. Rehabilitation and skill training programmes must be provided for women as an alternative source of income to women prostitutes.

25. Women must be encouraged to participate at all levels of decision-making.

26. Measures, including temporal special measures and programmes, must be adopted to give girls and women equal access to quality education and training.

27. The age of marriage must be the same for boys and girls.

28. The nationality law for married men and women must be revised to conform with the Convention.

29. Family life education, including family planning, should be expanded and improved.

30. There must be an intensive programme to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. Infected women and men must be guaranteed equal enjoyment of their human rights.

31. The Government must seek international support for poverty alleviation and educational programmes.

32. Every effort must be made to attain a stable and peaceful environment in order to reconstruct the country and create the conditions necessary for the sustainable development and integration of women.

33. In order to assist the Government in implementing its policies for women, the Committee deems it advisable to request a subsequent report, on an exceptional basis, to be submitted by 1 September 1997 for discussion at the seventeenth session of the Committee, in 1998.